

Salt River Fire Department Operating Guidelines

Positive Pressure Ventilation

April 2000

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PURPOSE

This procedure identifies the tactical application of positive pressure ventilation during structural fire operations and other techniques for use.

BENEFITS

Positive pressure ventilation (PPV) has many benefits to fire operations. They include:

1. PPV rapidly removes heat and smoke from the building, thus reducing the fires ability to propagate and advance.
2. PPV improves the atmosphere--thus improving patient survivability profiles.
3. Rapid removal of smoke improves the firefighter's ability to conduct search and rescue operations and loss control operations.
4. The improved atmosphere and visibility increases the firefighter's ability to conduct attack/extinguishment operations.
5. The improved atmosphere reduces firefighter heat stress.
6. PPV reduces losses caused by smoke and fire damage to the structure.
7. PPV can reduce the need for and risk of roof ventilation at many fires.

APPLICATION

All companies are equipped with high volume positive pressure fans. All offensive fire operations qualify for early application of PPV. Command should order PPV **where appropriate** and early in the operation.

PLACEMENT OF FANS

Positive pressure fans should be placed at the point of entry(s) from the unburned side of the fire and be coordinated with interior fire attack hoselines.

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Fans should be positioned 12-15 feet back from the entry point. The objective is to create a pressure "cone" effect around the door. This position will also allow access for crews to enter the building.

Where additional fans are required, placing two or more fans in "tandem"--one behind the other is more effective than side by side.

REQUIRE TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Positive pressure ventilation is effective only when applied properly. Three major conditions are required:

1. An "exit" for the pressurized air must be provided and must be located in the fire area. This is generally a window, door or other opening.
2. Positive pressure ventilation must be injected from the unburned side of the fire.
3. Ceilings should be intact to prevent extension of the fire into attic areas by PPV pressurization.

It will be the company officers responsibility to ensure that these three requirements are completed prior to injecting positive pressure into the structure.

CONTROLLING AIR FLOW

Air flow from PPV must be controlled throughout the operation. Too many openings or exit points reduce the effectiveness of PPV. In some cases, windows and doors that are already open may need to be closed to direct the air flow into the fire area, or the most densely affected smoke area.

As one area is cleared of smoke that area may need to be sealed off and another exit created in another area of the structure to direct the air flow into the next area to clear.

Company officers or Sector officers will be responsible for coordinating this effort.

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ATTIC FIRES

Isolated attic fires can benefit from PPV. During initial attack, fire crews should use small openings in the ceiling for water application. This will prevent the clear environment below the ceiling from rapidly filling with smoke. Moving from one room to another and "punching" the nozzle through the ceiling and using a fog application is very effective. Use of penetrating nozzles is also recommended. Loss control measures should be initiated simultaneously with fire attack.

An "exit" for PPV in the attic must be in place. Most roofs/attics have pre-existing vents typically at the end of the attic space in a vertical wall. These are often adequate for an "exit".

Some structures may have a "sealed" attic space with no in place vent openings. In this case, opening a vertical wall on one end of the attic or cutting a vent hole in the roof may be required. If pre-existing vents are too small, they may need to be enlarged.

Once PPV is in place, large sections of the ceiling can be pulled. PPV will keep the environment below the ceiling clear. Salvage operations should be completed before the ceiling is pulled.

MULTI-STORY/HIGH-RISE/BELOW GRADE STRUCTURES (i.e. Parking Garages/Basements)

Multi-story high-rise or below grade structure fires require greater coordination and additional fans.

Stairwells should be used to direct air flow from PPV. A stairwell should be selected. An exit in the fire area (i.e., window) is a first choice. In some situations, a stairwell on the opposite side of the fire area can be used. An exit for the exhaust must be obtained. A roof door is appropriate.

Multiple fans may be required. Two or more fans may be needed at the ground level of the building.

Additional fans may be needed on landings at various levels in the stairwell. A fan will be needed at the entry to the fire floor.

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Multi-story high-rise or below grade positive pressure ventilation is complex. A Ventilation Sector should be established to coordinate all aspects of PPV on all floors.

POSITIVE PRESSURE FOR EXPOSURE CONTROL

In some cases, PPV can be used for exposure control. This is most effective with common attics (i.e., strip shopping centers, and apartment complexes) or where separating walls may have been breached (i.e. plumbing, cracks, etc).

The objective is to introduce PPV ahead of a moving fire and force it back into the fire area.

An exit point in the fire area is needed in most cases.

For exposure control, the fans(s) would be placed at an entry point at most severe exposure first. If a heavy smoke condition exists, it may be beneficial to create a temporary opening (i.e., door) to allow an exit for the pressure and smoke. Once smoke has cleared, the exit should be closed, the building sealed, so that it will "over pressurize" the exposure. An opening in the ceiling will be required to pressurize the attic area.

Over pressurized air will force hot gases back down common attic spaces towards the fire area. This can prevent fire spread extension.

The second most critical exposure would then receive PPV in a similar manner. The next priority would be the fire occupancy.

LARGE BUILDINGS

Buildings with large square footage may require multiple fans, perhaps at more than one location to effectively remove smoke. These situations are more complex and require close coordination of PPV with all sector officers. Command should consider a Ventilation Sector to coordinate all ventilation operations in large buildings.

PRECAUTIONS

Positive pressure ventilation can create problems if not effectively managed, monitored, and coordinated. Be aware of the problems listed below and take appropriate corrective action.

1. An exit must be in the burned area or the fire may be pushed into the unburned portion.

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2. Because of positive pressure, a "blow torch" effect of fire blowing far out of the exit may occur. This is normal and predictable; adjacent exposures may need to be protected.
3. Do not direct a fire stream into an operating PPV exit point.
4. All concealed spaces including attic areas need to be checked for extension.
5. Company officers and/or sector officers will be responsible for monitoring and coordinating the application of PPV.
6. Gas powered fans do produce carbon monoxide and breathing apparatus may be required when PPV is used during overhaul operations.